

YOGA-VĀSIṢṬHA – A FRANK APPRAISAL

By

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[This study is based on the edition of the *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* (YV), accompanied by the commentary called *Tātparyaprakāśa* by Ānanda-bodha, edited by Pt. Wāsudev Laxmaṇ Śāstrī Paṇṣīkar, and published, in two volumes, by the Nirṇaya Sāgar Press of Bombay / Mumbai in 1911, consisting of 1572 pages in pica type in Double Crown size. References will be made to the work, wherever necessary, in numbers representing in sequence the serial number of the Book, the canto and the verse in that canto, the three being separated by dots. YV is divided into six Books, *prakaraṇas* : Vairāgya Mumukṣu-vyavahāra, Utpatti, Sthiti, Upaśama and Nirvāṇa. The Sixth Book, covering about one-half of the total expanse of the work, is divided into two parts, Pūrvārdha and Uttarārdha, indicated in the references in this articles as VIa and VIb.

Of the studies on YV, I have made use of T. G. Mainkar's *The Vāsiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa : A Study*, published in 1977 by Meharchand Lacchmandas, New Delhi, which makes a critical survey of the contents and earlier studies of the text by Atreya, Bhattacharya, Dasgupta, Raghavan and others.

The Marathi translation – a free and enlarged rendering (demi / 8, pp. 1650+) – of this text by V. V. Bapat Shastri, the *Bṛhad-Yoga-vāsiṣṭha-sāra*, published in 4 volumes during 1909-1912 by D. S. Yande, Mumbai, provided me with a handy aid in going hurriedly through the contents of the voluminous work. However, one has to use this rendering with caution, as the translator has inserted his own material in the translation frequently, which is no doubt related to the subject but has no correspondence with the original. Though styled '–sāra' , epitome, it is in a way an elaboration,–*vistāra*, of the original text.

Abbreviations frequently used in this article, in alphabetical order : BP = *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, MB = *Mahā-bhārata*, Rm = *Rāmāyaṇa*, YS = *Yoga-sūtra* by Patañjali, and YV. Abbreviations limited to short lengths are explained in the specific contexts; they are not shown here. Unspecified references into brackets are to YV.]

***Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* in relation to other known works**

The *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* reveals a special predilection for the philosophy as exposed by Gauḍapāda in his well-known Vedāntic work on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*; and there are many places where it indicates knowledge of Śaṅkara's bhāṣya on the Brahmasūtras of Bādarāyaṇa. The work is conversant with Āryabhaṭṭa's (6th c. AD) theory about the earth being spherical in shape and moving in the space without support (III.30.11-12) and refers to the *Pañcatantra* story of the monkey foolishly pulling up the wedge from a half-sawed timber with its tail inserted in the gap (IV. 53.29). It actually cites verses from the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *ad verbatim*, without acknowledgement (e. g. V. 5.44). There are places where other systems of philosophy (Sāṅkhya etc., including even Cārvāka, Buddhists and Jains) are criticised and terminology is employed which figures in latter-day treatises. Although the word Yoga is a constituent of the title of the work, and the Yoga terminology as well as typical concepts of Yoga (such as a Yogin simultaneously operating in many bodies) are employed in many places, the technical aspect of Yoga as conceived by Patañjali, termed Sāṅkhya-yoga (VIa. 29.18), is rarely touched upon. The Haṭha-yoga concept of the body with the mysterious organisation of arteries/veins also finds a place in this work (VIa. 24) although the term Haṭha-yoga seems to be replaced by the term Yoga-yoga (VIa. 69.19) in YV. As Vidyāraṇya's work on Vedānta, *Pañcadaśī* (cp. *Pañca*. IV. 64 with YV I.2.6), besides *Jīvanmukti-viveka*, quotes, at times with an obvious reference to YV, from this as well as its abridgement, the *Laghu-Yoga-vāsiṣṭha*, this work may be assigned to a period between Gauḍapāda (8th c. AD) and Vidyāraṇya (14th c. AD). Scholars have narrowed down this gap by setting Mammaṭa (1050 AD), the author of the *Kāvya-prakāśa*, and Jñāneśvara (around 1290 AD), a renowned Marathi saint-poet, as the upper and lower limits of YV.

This gap can still be narrowed down if we take into account the specialised astronomical information in YV which is first found noted in the work of the reputed astronomer and mathematician, Bhāskarācārya (1150 AD). Bhāskarācārya's date can, therefore, be taken as the upper limit of the date of

YV. Bhāskarācārya, older than Galelio by more than four centuries, was the first among the Indian astronomers to state, in no uncertain terms and in contradiction to the traditional view (but luckily, being born in India, escaping the persecution Galelio had to suffer) that the earth is plain like a mirror, that (a) the earth is spherical and (b) attracts things on it by the force of gravity. (*Siddhānta-śiromaṇi*, Golādhyāya-Bhuvana-kośa 6) Compare with this information what YV states about the earth: ‘As ants move on a spherical clod of earth in all directions, their feet are always down and back up.’ (III.30.12) YV assigns this phenomenon to the inherent quality of the earth to attract objects/creatures (III.30.32). The word for gravity in both the works is ‘*ākṛṣṭi*’, meaning a pull (*krṣṭi*) towards itself (*ā*). This decisive point is missed by all scholars writting on the data of YV, thus imposing serious limitations on their surmises springing from free imagination and incomplete data. Atreya’s attempt to place YV in the 5th-6th c. AD. must, therefore, be dismissed as based on partial evidence. Slaje (*ABORI* : 1996, p. 209) who places the work at the end of the first millennium AD is closer to the facts.

***Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* in a nutshell :**

(A) The form

The (a) *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* alias (b) *Vāsiṣṭha-rāmāyaṇa* alias (c) *Mahā-rāmāyaṇa* alias (d) *Mokṣopāya* (the last two names appearing in the text itself) is a voluminous work supposed to have come from the same pen as the celebrated great epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, consisting of 32,000 verses including occasional prose units. It is conceived as a work on Indian philosophy presented in a popular poetic style, in the form of a dialogue between Rāma, the hero of the epic, and his family preceptor, Vasiṣṭha, divided in a series of sessions taking place in the king’s court and attended by leading men and women, besides members of the royal family, continuing for several days —may be a month in all,—with breaks at nights, sometimes noted in the text, giving the impression of a modern intensive course.

The dialogue form employed in this work is, as in many cultural traditions in the world, patent with the ancient Indian philosophical and popular works like the Upaniṣads, *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas. The work shares with the Purāṇic literature the mania of boxing dialogues within dialogues so that the innermost pair flanked by successively outer pairs presents the semblance of a chain of pairs of brackets in algebra. Such a framework was perhaps considered helpful or essential

by ancient authors to endow on a work an appearance of authenticity. Like the Purāṇic literature, it is also furnished with the benefits (*phala-śruti*) the reader/listener would derive from the work. The author swears that the listener of his work would be forced to attain the supreme state (II.20.13-14).

In the presentation of contents, the author of the work seems to believe in the technique of driving the point home by repeating it; so he knows no bounds in repeating concepts, analogies, statements, descriptions and what not, to such an extent that one can reasonably think that, shorn of repetitions, the work would be much, much smaller. Its abridgement, the *Laghu-Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* of Gauḍa Abhinanda, is about one-fifth in extent (6000 verses) of the original work. In metaphorical terms, The author of YV has only 52 cards in his hand, but he presents them in different combinations as in any play of cards. The popular style of the work conveniently makes rooks for contents which, not infrequently, serve little purpose beyond divergence or decoration. In the works of the author himself, YV is a scientific work (*śāstra*) which, being poetic, is pleasing, replete with literary flavours, adorned with figures of speech and supported with analogies (II. 18.33). This claim is amply justified by the uncountable passages of poetic excellence spread over the entire work. The work displays an odd combination of poetic exuberance with a lack of the overall outlook / discretion of an artist.

(B) The content

The work frequently claims an allegiance to the Vedic view, implying the view of the Upaniṣads, although it deviates from it on many points including even fundamental ones. It draws on and lifts from all important ancient Sanskrit works of repute on a number of disciplines including poetics. But as it does not acknowledge the sources, it becomes a difficult task to assign it to a specific date. Within the Vedāntic limits, it declares its commitment, at the very outset (I. 1.7-8), to the compromising view that only a combination of knowledge and action (*jñāna-karma-samuccaya*) leads to the supreme state known as *mokṣa*, liberation. This view, influenced by Buddhist Vijñānavāda and the Vedānta master, Gauḍapāda, in particular, and in a general way by the Advaitic outlook of Śaṅkara, lends an awkward appearance to the total picture of the teaching of the work. When coupled with the author's poetic extravagance, this appearance gives the reader the impression of a giant museum.

What is a museum? It is an arbitrary collection of interesting articles not necessarily or essentially related to each other. The only criterion for inclusion of articles in this collection is that they should interest the majority that visits it. The visitors too do not expect a logical scheme to justify the collection. They would consider their visit amply paid for if they see in it something uncommon, unusual, attractive or amusing, and, above all, spend their time pleasantly, although they would prefer to move on quietly if they find excessive duplication of stereotype articles in some section or the other.

What makes YV a museum?

This is the nature of the impression one gets when one reads YV. The author of YV has no doubt assimilated all important works in Sanskrit, particularly in religion and philosophy, including *belles lettres* as well as literary criticism produced to his date and known to him; and he lifts concepts, lines and words from them as a habit to embellish his work. He occasionally makes references to views and schools, at times to works as well, in his area of operation; but, on the whole, he treats earlier literatures as ‘common wealth’ which he believes he can utilise without acknowledgement.

He has, in addition to episodes of his own invention, borrowed myths from earlier sources, but has changed them at will to suit his requirement. He has equated concepts from odd sources, e.g. *Śūnya* from Buddhist philosophy with *Brahman* from the Upaniṣads, so that protagonists of these concepts would shudder if they knew whom they are bracketted with. With the poet’s blood boiling in his veins, he produces lines after lines rich in poetic images, and is never tired of repeating them. He announces his loyalties to the Vedic tradition implying the Upaniṣadic thought current, but feels no compunctions in making changes in their setup, without warning, when he thinks otherwise. He never once utters the word *saṁnyāsa*, renunciation, in the vast expanse of his work, although the concept is inseparable from the Upaniṣadic thought. Instead, he insists on human effort and performance of duty, howsoever inconsistent they may be with the constantly repeated idea of the illusory character of the world. When Vasiṣṭha advises Rāma to rule his kingdom with the equanimity of a liberated man, one wonders how to apply established laws to situations and persons in an illusory society? We certainly do not think of punishing a man for the crime he may have committed in a play on the stage. Traditional great gods like Brahman, Viṣṇu and Śiva are, for the author of YV, no more than souls, belonging to the *jīvan-mukta* class (II.13.22) as they are, in higher

status commanding greater powers and enjoying special privileges; it is puzzling how one can attain higher spiritual level by worshipping them as YV includes their worship too among the numerous odd things which its poetically gifted author has accommodated in it.

Where YV parts with the tradition

A study of the Vedānta texts reveals that the pre-conditions as stated in them (viz. *viveka*, *vairāgya*, *śama*, *dama*, etc.) are absent in the older sources of the subject, viz. the Upaniṣads and the BG. They make their first appearance in the Brahmasūtras of Bādarāyaṇa as interpreted by Śaṅkara, probably in imitation of other texts of this type such as Jaimini's sūtras on Mīmāṃsā. In matters of 'dharma', religion, which is ultimately founded on convention, such pre-conditions may be relevant; but in philosophy which is concerned with the knowledge of the reality, they are irrelevant. Presented in the framework of a story, the YV has evaded such a contingency by depicting Rāma developing on his own the mood of *vairāgya* and other spiritual qualities going with it. But while the traditional Vedāntic works, consistent with their teaching, expect their readers to aspire for retirement from worldly life, Vasiṣṭha in YV advises Rāma to devote himself to his princely duties with the outlook of a philosopher or liberated man who treats the world as an illusion. With this object in view, it appears that the author of YV attempts to replace the traditional set of spiritual qualities by another set included in his concept of 'the four door-keepers of liberation' (II.11.59), viz. *śama* (peace / tranquility of mind), *vicāra* (discrimination), *saṁtoṣa* (contentment) and *sādhū-saṁgama* (company of the good). He seems to imply that, for liberation, it is not necessary to take a negative view and sever oneself from the world. It is another matter that this stand has landed him in insurmountable logical inconsistencies.

YV aspires to excel BG

However, it may be noted that the author of YV does not dispense with the traditional spiritual qualities such as *vairāgya*, as he himself favours the *sāttvika* type of it (II.11.22), born of deep thinking as was that of Rāma, and damns what is popularly known as the *śmaśāna-vairāgya*, meaning occasional, temporary dejection (II.11.28). It is possible to take this exposition as a criticism in disguise of the type of *vairāgya* Arjuna of the BG displays which is caused by the upsetting thought of being instrumental to virtual eradication of his family in the imminent war. This may be taken as an indication of the aspiration of the author of YV to excel its model, the BG, which is corroborated by some

other aspects as well. The BG nowhere states categorically that a combination of knowledge and action is necessary to attain liberation; YV does not make it a secret that it has come into existence expressly to establish this doctrine (I.1.7). The author of YV presumably considers BG to be too short (700 verses) to make an impact on the reader; so he has made his work 45 times larger than its model. This fact has naturally resulted in his multiplying poetic devices to 'cosmic' dimensions. As a habit he indulges in a series of fanciful images where BG is satisfied with a single, effective one. This may remind one of a remark by Lloyd George with reference to the now historical Soviet Russia: 'There is more wealth than taste in this country.' The only promise Kṛṣṇa gives Arjuna at the end of the BG is: 'Surrender to me; I will absolve you of all sins'. Rāma in YV has attained *jīvan-mukta*-hood on attending the YV course (I.3.16); and anyone who listens to YV would attain it, promises the work (I.1.52; I.2.10).

Major inconsistency in YV

One finds it strange that the author of YV is not aware of the utter inconsistency between the ethical concept of 'duty' and the trans-ethical outlook of the philosopher as stated in YV. How can we expect Rāma to do his regal, martial, judicial, administrative and such other duties in the contemporary social setup with the outlook of a philosopher unless such an outlook is regarded as a fashion or decoration? If everything is supposed to have taken place as YV advises, are we to think that Rāma remained unmoved when Rāvaṇa abducted Sītā or when later, Rāma himself banished her? Such a ridiculous situation arises because, in his enthusiasm to fit philosophy in the story of Rm, the author of YV has fitted square pegs in round holes. Needless to say that he has utterly failed in convincing the reader of the logic of his plan. Such a situation is absurd because it involves a mixture of ontological levels, or is cross-ontological. True, BG too concludes by advising Arjuna to do his duty which he does; but there is no indication that he had become a *jīvan-mukta*. By all tests and criteria, he was, at the end of the BG course, no doubt a soul with better understanding, knowing that he was miles away from the state of a *jīvan-mukta* and must, therefore, follow the scheme of social duties framed by the tradition for the common man. This awareness may, in modern terminology, be called 'professional commitment'. Liberation in the real philosophical sense liberates one also from being a 'professional' of any kind. Following the poetic style of YV, one may say that at the door of liberation hangs the warning : 'No entry for any professional'. YV in its own right seems to make concessions, wrongly, in matters philosophical, either because of some

confusion about the state of liberation or of a worldly concern, howsoever high it may be for a man of the world; but concessions are considerations of worldly life, not of the state beyond it which liberation certainly is.

General outlook towards women and outcasts

It is amusing to note that the pre-condition of detachment (*vairāgya*) for the acquisition of the highest knowledge which philosophy stands for has, as the literary tradition vindicates, resulted in the derogatory outlook towards woman and family. An aspirant of liberation must keep away from woman who ensnares him in bondage and ultimately in worldly life, and is in fact a poisonous plant (YV VIa.6.41). To create in him an attitude of disgust for woman, emphasis is laid on descriptions of the female body as a mere network of bones and flesh and impurities, in stark contrast to its fascinating descriptions found in poetry. This tendency makes an impression that philosophy and its goal are preserves only of the males. It is amusing to observe that advocates of this outlook never bother about the manures which go to make the fruit as well as other produces of the land when they relish them. There is thus a polar difference between the Reality the Vedānta preaches, that the same conscious principle pervades all bodies and the universe, and the prejudicial treatment of the subject in the tradition of authors on Vedānta. This means that the authors are miles away from the outlook an awareness of the principles of the subject should inculcate, and are unable to step out of the shell they are brought up within. This is vindicated by the derogatory outlook reflected in the occasional references to widows (YV III. 4.26), low-caste society (YV VIa. 124.1; BP IV.2.13) etc. found in Vedāntic works.

Positive outlook of YV towards life

It must, however, be said to the credit of YV that, unlike the popular belief that Vedāntic outlook is inclined towards acceptance of man's helplessness *vis-à-vis* his actions in past lives which, as fate, shape his future, the YV strongly advocates man's free will and his ability to mould his future with determined efforts. No stronger pleading for human efforts against odds is found in the range of Sanskrit, particularly philosophical, literature than that one finds in YV. The occasion for YV to elaborate this point as an important and serious topic is provided in the introductory portions where Rāma, deeply absorbed in and overcome by the negative aspects of human life, is shown to have developed a mood of despondency and dejection at an age when he is supposed to open his book of career. The entire philosophy of YV is

offset against this backdrop and as a decisive cure for the ailment Rāma was suffering from. This is corroborated by the concluding part of the work showing the hero restored to his natural youthful spirit focused on the pursuit of the path of action. This follows precisely the plan of the BG, with the only difference that the occasion in BG is more natural and convincing than its imitation, as is always the case. The author of the BG does not attempt to claim that Arjuna fought the devastating war with equanimity as a *jīvan-mukta*. Another instance on the point is the imitation of Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* in YV (VIb. 119), where we find that the author has employed even the Mandākrāntā metre of the imitated.

Flights of imagination in YV and contemporary technology

Coming to the general characteristics of the text under discussion, the flights of imagination the YV indulges in, —like those in the science fiction of Jules Verne which, as we know, eventually turned out to be visions rather than mere figs of imagination, —create an awareness in the reader that there is no basis for taking matter, time and space as absolute. An imaginative Purāṇic story creates a situation in which a king leaves the earth with his daughter and visits the Creator's world to consult him on the issue of finding a suitable groom for her. The Creator points out to him that, during the short span the king has been away from the earth, uncountable generations and multiples of aeons on the earth have been away from the earth, uncountable generations and multiples of aeons on the earth have been a matter of the past and made the context of his visit far obsolete (BP IX.3.29-33). One wonders if the author of this story had a vision of the relativity of time and space. As Einstein has ably argued out, time would assume unthought-of dimensions if we succeed in breaking the limitations of the tiny nest we occupy, called earth.

This must not be construed to mean that the possibilities of technological developments at the time of Jules Verne or Einstein existed at the time of YV or the Purāṇas. Abstract thinking is founded on logical possibilities and certainties, and not on contemporary technological developments. The Puṣpaka aircraft in the Rm, large enough to accommodate the entire army of Rāma, is an instance comparable to Jules Verne's fictions, though the former is conceived at a much higher level of exaggeration. The atomic theory of the Vaiśeṣikas, on the contrary, is the outcome of subtle logical abstract thinking; it stands on its own feet. It is the ability of abstract thinking that has enabled Upaniṣadic thinkers to scale

heights in the search of the subjective world which, being rationally argued out, still remain substantially unchallenged. It would, therefore, be indiscrete to discard abstract thinking of past masters, whether it be related to matter or spirit, in consideration of contemporary technological developments.

***Jñāna-karma-samuccaya* as the joint means of liberation**

The YV, from the very beginning, makes no secret of its view that liberation is achieved by *Jñāna-karma-samuccaya* (*Jks*), a combination of knowledge and action, a stand taken also by Ānandavardhana in his commentary on the BG. At the end of both these works, the disciples (Rāma and Arjuna) confess that their problems are solved by the philosophical knowledge imparted to them and they promise they would do their duties willingly and whole-heartedly. Apparently, the picture does make such an impression; and it is in the fitness of things if the term *Jks* is understood in this popular sense. In the philosophical context, however, this term is not used or understood in this sense. It implies that a combination of the highest knowledge and action is the joint means of liberation, *mokṣa*; and there is no doubt that such a view was held by some in Indian philosophical tradition. Śaṅkara in his commentary on the BG discusses this view at several places and points out the logical flaw in it.

Inconsistency of *Jñāna-karma-samuccaya* with the concept of liberation

Liberation, in order to be an eternal state, has to be inherent and not achieved by efforts; for whatever is achieved by some means, like the heaven achieved by means of sacrifices, is certain to be lost some time or the other. Knowledge only removes ignorance/perversion; and there arises the realisation of liberation already in the nature of the soul. If even knowledge is denied the status of being a *direct means* of liberation, how can action hope to claim such a status? If action takes place after knowledge in its philosophical sense, it is only the semblance of an action, as the liberated soul is not involved in it. In fact it is inaction, as BG styles it at several places (e.g. BG IV. 18-23). It is the performer's involvement that makes a world of difference. The judge serves a death sentence to criminal charged with murder; but the judge does not thereby commit a crime despite the fact that his judgement results in a death. Why? Because he has no motivation or personal gain in giving his judgement. A real action is one that is done by the performer consciously for a worldly purpose, –the only kind of purpose an action can have. In brief, the concept of *Jks* is illogical as it militates against the very concept of liberation. What Rāma or

Arjuna did after and intensive course in philosophy, was plain action done, maybe, with a wider but still worldly, view. To regard them as *jīvan-mukta*, as YV does in the case of Rāma, is to treat a quack doctor as a qualified Doctor. Knowledge in its philosophical sense is a rare phenomenon. It is a jumbled understanding of intellectual knowledge and philosophical knowledge—knowledge which is lived – that has misled the protagonists of *Jks*. The author of YV naïvely considers the concept established by just offering an analogy: as a bird flies with two wings, the aspirant attains liberation by knowledge and action (I.1.7-8). Just listen to this work, the author claims, and you will be a *jīvan-mukta* (II.52). This is possible only on a poetic level, if at all. This opening sample reflects the author's style of treatment of his subject throughout the work.

***Jñāna-karma-samuccaya* is logically untenable**

But what if one accepts the view called *Jks* with its inherent logical inconsistency? The case of the YV and the BG as interpreted by some may be one of this nature. All devotional sects, for instance, willingly accept duality involved in it and are not interested in claiming that their position is logically impeccable, since rational approach is radically different from one of faith. True; but such a claim, if and when made, needs to be established on the strength of undeniable proof. The fact is that the works in question unequivocally accept the logical framework of the concept of liberation as arising from its ultimate source, the Upaniṣads, leaving not the slightest room for a compromise in theory. The view that worldly life is full of suffering, that it is an illusion founded, through error, on the pure nature of the Self, that the only path to get rid of suffering is through the practice of spiritual qualities like detachment which, in their wake, bring about the enlightenment that characterises liberation, leave no room for a compromise implied in the hypothesis of *Jks*. Actions prior to the acquisition of enlightenment and posterior to it taking place as long as the body survives cannot justify this hypothesis, as the prior ones do not accompany the aspirant of liberation beyond a preparatory stage, and the posterior ones, being bereft of involvement which alone makes them real actions, are no actions at all (BG IV. 18-23).

Style of Śaṅkara and of YV

Comparing philosophical position of the author of YV with that of Śaṅkara in his treatment of the Vedānta, one develops a feeling that the former relies more on hypothesis than the latter who supports Vedāntic concepts by the facts of experience. In other words, the former builds castles in the air

while the latter does so on the ground. The former cares for the ground, only as a necessity for a take-off and pursues the rest of the journey in the space of imagination; the latter always keeps in touch with the ground of logic and experience. The former has treated its subject matter in a poet's style by letting loose his imagination; the latter has treated his subject in a scientist's manner by logically arguing his point out. The former asserts, heaping analogies on analogies as if they were scientific proofs; the latter proves his point, bringing in an analogy only as a pedagogic tool of understanding what has been proved by evidence. The former is primarily a poet making philosophy an excuse for exhibiting his poetic skill; the latter, a thinker expounding philosophy in a scientific manner.

Does poetic style match philosophy in nature?

If we do not go to the extreme position that the author of YV makes philosophy an excuse for exhibiting his poetic skills, and accept that philosophy is his chief aim, and that he is treating the subject in a poet's style, one can legitimately ask if this style matches the subject? Poetry starts and ends with emotions and works on the basis of the empathetic abilities of the human mind. Without mind and its gifts, poetry would be helpless. Now, the aim of philosophy is, as the author of YV himself frequently announces in unequivocal terms, *manonāśa* or the annihilation of mind, the ultimate source of worldly suffering. Here then we have a strange situation: what is essentially needed for the success of the style is to be progressively discarded for the purposefulness of the content. In effect for the reader, this is a tug of war leading the reader to a total confusion! The reason why philosophy has furnished themes for literature very rarely is to be found in this inherent conflict between the two. Even in cases where poets have set on literary ventures based on philosophical themes (as in the case of the play, *Prabodha-candrodaya*), the effect partakes more of literary pleasure than philosophical enlightenment. This would lead us to the inevitable conclusion that YV can hope to be a success either as a literary product or a philosophical exposition. In fact, however, it has failed on both the counts: on the literary count because its author miserably lacks the sense of proportion and indulges in external attributes of poetry; and on the count of philosophy because he is ignorant of scientific methodology of the subject.

Internal inconsistency in YV

Let us leave aside the consideration of poetic aspect of YV and examine

its key-concepts for internal consistency. Dissolution of mind and its attributes such as *vāsanā*-s, is liberation (I.3.8-9); one who is thus liberated while living is a *jīvan-mukta*; the moment his body dies, he is *videha-mukta*. From a purely theoretical point of view, there is no difference between the two categories of *jīvan-mukta*-s; for the mind, the agency which relates him to the body, no more exists. This exposition leaves no scope for any trace of the mind complex in the state of liberation. The author then seems to have changed his mind when he talks of the sustenance of 'pure' *vāsanā*-s (I.3.11) and of 'superior' types of ego, *ahamkāra* (IV.33.49..), in this state. Nothing would be more distorted in the representation of the Upaniṣadic concept of liberation, *mokṣa*. For the author of YV, *mokṣa* is an endless sleep—*ananta-susupti*, but it is not deadness as of a stone (VIb. 174.15, 17). And yet, he sees nothing wrong in stating that the Supreme Self (*paramātmā*) has a stonelike character (II.10.49). He can skip this charge by referring to his declaration that analogies are partial! Is poetic style a charter for freedom to commit any number of logical offenses? Apart from such inconsistencies, a *jīvan-mukta*, endowed with 'pure' *vāsanā*-s and 'superior' *ahamkāra*, can, like any ordinary man, carry on all business of worldly life (I.2.30), including even sex, as one can judge from the later life of Rāma, certified by YV as a *jīvan-mukta* after he did the intensive course in philosophy given by Vasiṣṭha; and yet he can claim that he does nothing even while doing everything : *sarvam eva ca kurvanti, na kurvantiha kimcana* (II.13.2). This situation is a funny, rather absurd, as the one implied in the oft-quoted remark : 'All men are equal; but some are more equal than others.' The precedent of king Janaka often cited in this context is a myth; and a myth carries no weight in scientific thinking. His high sounding traditional declaration that he would remain undisturbed even if his city, Mithilā, is on fire is good as poetry, not as a proof of scientific facts.

***Jīvan-mukta* : cheap**

The YV scheme makes the concept of a *jīvan-mukta* cheap,—makes the impression that being a *jīvan-mukta* is a matter of affidavit or certification, and not one of substantiation by objective evidence. According to this scheme, even butchers like Hitler, Stalin, Paul Pot, Idi Amin, Saddam Husain, and now Bin Laden—to quote some names from the recent world history can claim to be de facto *jīvan-mukta*-s who have done their duties without involvement, as YV advises, The argument that the residual past actions, *prārabdha*, of a *jīvan-mukta* may involve him in any kind of action without disturbing his status as a liberated soul makes the whole theory of liberation void, as it leaves the doors of liberation open even to rascals. It is perhaps this

contingency which made Sureśvarācārya, the author of *Naiṣkarmya-siddhi* (IV.69), restrict the bahaviour of a *jīvan-mukta* within reasonable limits. He categorically says that spiritual qualities like kindness to others manifest in a man of realisation without any effort on his part. The concept of *prārabdha* is after all a hypothesis; it must be used with discretion only in exceptional cases, if at all.

***Jīvan-mukta*-s by YV criteria**

Actually, the author of YV has admitted to the order of *jīvan-mukta*-s all the brothers of Rāma and his parents except Kaikeyī (bad luck!), not to talk of Daśaratha's eight ministers and some sages present in the assembly (I.2.25-28). Among others of the Rāmāyaṇa group who received this status in *absentia* are Śītā, Hanumat, Vibhīṣaṇa and Suṣeṇa. On the other side, YV makes the concept so extensive as to include in its fold even the so called great gods such as Viṣṇu and Śiva (II.13.22) – gods who are to their devotees no less than the highest principle (*Brahman*) incarnate. This is an outlook no doubt unusually bold but altogether different from the one prevailing in classical Vedānta which assigns to God as the Supreme Principle conceived with a visual form, the duty of facilitating the devotee in developing meditative abilities (Cf. BG 12.2-5). In the YV scheme as it looks, even a stock-broker would stand a chance to claim this status if he so wishes, and even the supreme God would be unceremoniously demoted to the status of a soul, no doubt enjoying a higher level as a *jīvan-mukta* and situated in a supreme commanding position. And YV has made it simple still: just listen to YV, and you will be a *jīvan-mukta* (I.1.52)! He is making this bold offer perhaps because he is aware that not many would command the patience the voluminous work would demand for reading it from end to end. What is more surprising is that members of the *jīvan-mukta* class are said to face calmly whatever is imposed on them by their actions in past lives operating in the present life (*yathāprāpta* = *prārabdha*, I.2.29); and yet, YV declares that effort/action (*pauruṣa*) in past lives can be overpowered by effort/action in the present life (II.4.17).

The unreal can be denied against something real

YV constantly harps on the theme that the world is an illusion like a barren woman's son, mirage, rope-snake and so on. When Śaṅkara treats of this subject following the line of the Upaniṣads, he does bring in analogies no doubt, but takes care that his denial of appearance is made against something

real. The Upaniṣads deny the reality of the pot only against the reality of the clay. Following this method, the woman, the sands and the rope are real, while the son, mirage and the snake are unreal. The world is denied against the reality of the Self whose real nature, shorn of worldly attributes superimposed on it, is manifested in deep sleep, a state experienced by all creatures.

What is unreality?

It is possible to turn this awareness in deep sleep into a permanent state called liberation, distinguished from deep sleep on the count of the sleep being impermanent. The distinction arises from the fact that the cause of worldly life, the nescience/ignorance, remains in a dormant state in deep sleep and becomes active again when we wake up; in liberation, it is totally annihilated. Liberation is an exclusively personal experience. The world ceases to exist for the liberated; but it continues to be what it is for the rest of the creatures. Aware of this rationale, YV constantly emphasises annihilation of mind as a precondition for the achievement of liberation which is in fact the restoration of the soul to its original nature. If the world is an appearance it is in the sense that it ceases to cause pleasure and pain to the liberated who lacks individuality rooted in its ties with body and mind, a necessary condition for receiving worldly experience, and not in the sense that the world totally ceases to exist for all. Once this nature of liberation is understood, it becomes meaningless to go on repeating, as YV does, the stock analogies leading to the impression that the world is unsubstantial. If the world is the manifestation of the Brahman, as Vedāntic works including YV maintain, how can one, in the same breath, call it unsubstantial? And if, as YV explains, liberation is a state comparable to an endless sleep (*ananta-suṣupti*, VIb. 174.15), obviously it matters little whether the world exists or not for the liberated.

The world exists for the unliberated as before

In other words, the YV concept of unreality is not the same as the Upaniṣadic concept of the same. The terminology of the triad of perception which YV too frequently employs, – *draṣṭṛ*, *drśya* and *darśana* brings out the same point. Liberation is the process of ridding the soul of its attribute of perception through the agency of the mind, by a systematic negation of mind, while its nature as a 'witness' which the Self in its pure form (implying vision of the world without the soul's being affected by it) is left untouched. This view is conveyed without distortion by the Upaniṣadic analogies like the pot (unreal) and the clay (real), not by YV analogies like a barren woman's son, mirage etc. The Sāṃkhya-Yoga concept of liberation, *kaivalya*, is not

different from this, as Patañjali expounds it in YS II.22: 'The world, though it ceases to exist for the liberated, continues to exist for others who perceive it.' It is obviously through the import of Buddhist view into Vedānta, thanks to Gauḍapāda and YV, that the idea of illusion with matching analogies has found a place in the latter, and the result is the jumbling of the concepts of reality and unreality in Vedānta as we find in later works.

Role of analogies : decorative or persuasive?

But do additions or changes in analogies matter so long as the concept to be conveyed remains unchanged? It is true that the place of analogies in discursive works is secondary to the concept, and an analogy is meant to be taken only for the aspect for which it is given. This is why an analogy (*dr̥ṣṭānta*) is said to be partial (*ekadeśin*); and even the author of YV explains the role of analogies in a discursive work in a similar manner and warns the readers against taking them except in the aspect applying to the matter at hand (II.18.50-54, 19.12).

Poetic view of analogies

However, as poetic theorists claim, the class of analogies, whatever the technical differences of the figures of speech coming under it, does not operate only at the surface level; it carries with it at the level of suggestion the associations going with the objects of comparison selected. It is with the aid of this potential of poetic images and the human mind's inherent ability to yield to empathy that a poet creates in his readers a mood congenial to his purpose. This fact enhances the scope and strength of analogies in poetry. This aspect cannot be ignored even if the work under discussion is primarily discursive, and the widely read author of YV can certainly not be aware of this nature and purpose of poetic imagery. Why, otherwise, should the author of YV first cite the analogy of the seed and tree concealed in it (III.81.86), and later find with it (IV.1.21-24)? This means that he is not prepared to take the risk of making an impression on the mind of the reader that he considers the world to have an element of reality in it, howsoever remotely it is related to it. One wonders why the author did not delete the analogy and its criticism altogether if, in his capacity as the author, he had the full authority to do so.

Theorising for a practical purpose is unscientific

It is possible to justify the YV emphasis on the illusive nature of the

world by saying that it is meant for a purpose: to generate the attitude of dejection and detachment towards worldly pleasures, i.e. *vairāgya*. If this be the fact, YV is exposed to the charge of promulgating unscientific knowledge for achieving what it considers to be the goal of philosophy. Serious works never indulge in distorting knowledge for a practical gain, howsoever desirable it may be. Wise parents never indulge in cautioning their child against visiting a particular place by telling the child that it is haunted by ghosts, as such a false caution is likely to create serious psychological problems which the child may carry as it grows. To preserve the purity of Vedāntic thought, it is high time it should be rid of elements prejudicial to its practice in life. This aspect may legitimately be left to the Yoga system which has come into existence for this specific purpose.

Post-liberation action (?)

Even if consideration of the purity of thought is set aside, the YV view of the world, that it is illusory, is inconsistent with its heroic defence of man's efforts (*pauruṣa*) and its insistence on doing worldly duties or actions after attaining the state of a *jīvan-mukta*, as presumably Rāma did, according to YV. Doing actions in a perfectly mindless state for a world that does not exist,—what logic is this? It is funny to think that post-liberation actions are the means of liberation, if the *Jks* theory implies it. A means has to precede, and not follow, its effect. If they are not the means, what good would they do to one who has already attained his goal which, once attained, is permanent? If the *jīvan-mukta* is required to do his duties not for his gain but for the good of others, it implies that he is not rid of worldly considerations, – a sure sign of his mind functioning at the same level as his worldly fellow-beings for whom the world is not illusory, and the duality is real. The practice of actions for the guidance of others (*loka-saṁgraha*) recommended by BG (III.20) cannot be regarded as meant for the liberated man; for recommendations and prohibitions are no more relevant to a liberated man than to a dead one. Whatever a *jīvan-mukta* appears to others as doing is what his body continues to do by the force of habit. It is unintended, unmotivated, unplanned – like the blinking of the eyes, or like breathing, – and hence no real action.

YV : a practical guide for life?

Observations made so far apply if YV is viewed as a scientific work on philosophy treating its subject in pursuance of the tenets of logic. It is possible to view it as a practical guide for the common man aiming at inculcating in him an attitude towards the world that would enable him to

make life tolerable/liveable. There is logic in presuming that if a man develops the outlook that the world is an illusion, he can put up comfortably with the course of life he cannot help accepting. If we take such a sympathetic view of the work, this work would assume the character of a psychological treatment aimed at replacing habit-forming tranquilising drugs. This is a practical way which even psychiatrists would approve with some reservations; and there is nothing wrong in devising and pursuing such ways. Even hypnotism has a place in the treatment of mental disorders, as nature has equipped the mind with propensities to develop beliefs which certainly reduce tensions and save life from a possible collapse. It is possible to view concepts like *mokṣa* and all that goes with them as mere possibilities that, with the rationale structure supporting them, persuade a spiritually inclined intellectual to accept tensions in life as facts and mould his life accordingly, ultimately smoothening the course of his life in *this* world of mortals.

If the YV, with all its merits and drawbacks, aims at this end, there is no reason why one should take its author to task for his flights of imagination and logical inconsistencies. Is it not a fact that all devotional sects founded on faith serve the purpose of supporting life in the event of tension and frustration? When 'faith cure' is given credence it certainly deserves, there is no reason why devotional sects should be dismissed as the asylum for the credulous? The practical common man, interested in favourable results, little bothers about whether the cure satisfies scientific theorist. 'The end justifies the means' – this is the basis of all that is life's concern. This explains why a practical man says, with Pope: 'For forms of government let fools contest. – That which is best administered is best.' There is nothing strictly logical or rational in life; for, frankly, life is a compromise in which, in the ultimate analysis, everything is relative.

Philosopher as a psychiatrist

This revaluation of YV makes it possible to consider its author a virtual psychiatrist treating the patient not with drugs but with spiritual way of thinking, – with a difference. The psychiatrist's drugs tranquilise the patient with *force*; and their effect is temporary. The spiritual psychiatrist, on the other hand, *persuades* the patient to train/cultivate/elevate his mind to give up propensities that make it disturbed, violent and unbalanced. This approach is more fundamental and therefore longlasting. There certainly is a point in the philosopher's claim that most of our pleasures and pains in life are rooted

in out ego as an individual or as a member of the society; and this in its turn gives rise to our sense of possession, natural or cultivated. The philosopher names these basic instincts/trends as 'I' and 'My', which start from the very body complex we are each endowed with. This is a perfectly logical analysis. This leads us to the conclusion that if we succeed in ridding ourselves of these two instincts, we can hope to get rid of the pleasures and pains generated by them. True, man wishes to get rid of pain only, and not from pleasure; but since the root cause of both is the same, viz. the ego, efforts to eradicate one automatically results in that of the other too. And going beyond both has its own bliss, free from all worldly limitations.

Finally, the museum, again

If, indeed, the author of YV is satisfied with setting up a grand museum which, when being viewed, would train the visitor in treating the realities of the world as their incidental concern that need not disturb their mind, well, the objective of this extra-ordinarily sustained laboured is achieved.